

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Bureau for Near Eastern Affairs (NEA)

Office of Middle East Partnership Initiatives (MEPI)

Funding Opportunity Title: Civil Society Support

Announcement Type: Pre-applications

CFDA Number: 19.500

Due Date for Pre-Applications: February 8, 2005

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I. Funding Opportunity Description: The Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) announces an open competition for grant applications that support the role of civil society throughout the Middle East in advancing reform.

Regional civil society gatherings, most recently in Alexandria, Cairo and Beirut, have yielded a series of principles and reform priorities shared by civil society activists throughout the Middle East towards strengthening their role in advancing reform. These events, and other ongoing initiatives, have defined an important indigenous agenda whose ownership needs to remain rooted in the region. Civil society organizations and networks have a wealth of experience and human capital that can be further cultivated and strengthened with responsive, demand-driven support from those on the outside.

Notwithstanding individual country differences and the importance of understanding specific historical, cultural, socio-economic and political contexts, the broad expected outcomes of MEPI's support for civil society include the ability of citizens to: exercise freedoms that are guaranteed and protected by law; access multiple and credible sources of information; participate in free, fair and competitive elections as voters and as candidates and to engage as active citizens with their governing institutions (executive, judicial and legislative) across the entire range of issues affecting the lives of individuals and communities; and the ability of women to participate fully in political, economic, and social spheres. MEPI will support efforts of civil society as a positive catalyst for reform towards these broad goals.

This RFA is focused on direct support of civil society organizations in the region, towards advancing priority issues identified by indigenous civil society groups. In the interest of complementing ongoing efforts, MEPI strategy will prioritize support for civil society coalitions and networks, regional initiatives, as well as programs in countries and sectors in which there has been less investment.

This represents a new MEPI funding initiative and is not focused on areas where there exist significant ongoing donor efforts, including capacity building and institutional development, civic education training and publications, and rights awareness training and workshops. RFA submissions must demonstrate knowledge of other ongoing civil society and reform programs in the region (MEPI-funded and otherwise).

MEPI is seeking concept papers as pre-applications under this RFA. Concept papers need to outline a detailed series of activities linked to reform, why these issues are a priority, and how these activities would build on expertise that already exists throughout the MENA region with sustainable impact. Pre-applications must clearly articulate the institutional capacity and expertise of the submitting organization(s).

Some illustrative areas of project focus include but are not limited to:

- Expanding space for associative life, including activities centered on advocating for less restrictive NGO laws, removing temporary laws and decrees, and encouraging consistent and fair application of the law.
- Enhancing the role of CSOs in fostering linkages with governing institutions, such as legislatures, local councils, and political parties, including taking advantage of openings that already exist (e.g. ability of private citizens and CSOs to present draft legislation to parliament).
- Redefining “capacity building” projects to focus on the acquisition and application of skills needed for CSOs to play a more meaningful, sustained role in the reform process. This includes coalition-building, lobbying and broader membership outreach among civil society organizations. This also includes incorporating women’s special political and economic capacity-building needs into programming.
- Encouraging innovative projects in areas of citizen groups aiming to improve budget accountability, e-governance, and transparency.

MEPI is particularly interested in supporting the following areas:

- Region-based societal observatories and institutions that benchmark and monitor reform and best practices through analytical models and research.
- Support (infrastructure and activities) for a fledgling civil society network, cyber or otherwise.

- Creation of public information centers/libraries on reform.
- Creation of a legal fund for targeted research leading to advocacy.
- Activating volunteer networks on reform activities.
- Use of journalists and indigenous media institutions as strengthening reform efforts and networks.

MEPI encourages local organizations to form coalitions that would work together on specific reform issues and priorities, and would share information and expertise with one another. Coalitions could include NGOs, trade unions, chambers of commerce, journalists, professional associations, and academic institutions. Individual organizations and/or coalitions (existing and new) may submit a single pre-application.

Pre-applications may be for individual countries or for programs with a regional scope. Individual country programs may be proposed in: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Israel and the West Bank and Gaza. However, where the USG and others are current supporting or has supported extensive bilateral programs, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Israel and the West Bank and Gaza, MEPI will pay particular attention not to duplicate existing efforts.

Funding Instrument Type: Grants

Anticipated Total Program Funding: \$3 million in Federal Fiscal Year 2005

Electronic Link to Full Announcement: Go to <http://www.mepi.state.gov>, click on Current Opportunities, click on Civil Society Program Announcement.

II. Award Information: NEA expects to award approximately 15 grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000. Awards, initially, may be funded for one year, with an option to extend for up to one additional year based on the achievement of performance metrics in the first year, availability of funds, and the best interests of the U.S. Government.

NEA reserves the right to award less, or more than the funds described, in the absence of worthy applications, or under such other circumstances as may be deemed to be in the best interest of the U.S. Government.

Ceiling on amount of individual Awards: \$250,000

Floor of Individual Award Amounts: \$50,000

Project and Budget Periods: These funds are intended for start-up or short-term initiatives. Proposed project periods may be up to 2 years. The initial budget period may be up to 17 months. Applications for continuation grants funded under these awards, beyond the initial budget period, will be entertained on a noncompetitive basis, subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the grantee, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the Department of State.

Background Information about MEPI: MEPI is a Presidential initiative to promote positive change in the Middle East and North Africa through diplomatic efforts and through results-oriented programs, both regional and specific to individual countries. Reform is of strategic, long-term importance to the national security interests of the United States and to the U.S. goal of ensuring that the people of the region experience the benefits that come with more open economies, greater educational opportunities, and political freedom. A key element of MEPI is creating links and partnerships with Arab, U.S. civil society, and governments to jointly achieve sustainable reform.

Additional Background Information: Proposals that offer full participation by women and/or youth are encouraged. All applicants are asked to include in their proposals under any pillar an explanation of how women and youth in particular will benefit, and, if this is not applicable, an explanation of why not.

In keeping with the President's Volunteers for Prosperity initiative, proposals that use highly skilled American volunteers are encouraged. The proposal should explain clearly how the volunteers will be used and, if this is not applicable, an explanation of why not.

Successful applicants will be expected to coordinate closely with the Department of State, NEA/PI, the MEPI regional offices in Tunis and Abu Dhabi, and relevant U.S. Embassies/Consulates, as appropriate, in the implementation of all aspects of their program.

III. Eligibility Information: Eligible applicants include any registered non-governmental organization.

MEPI encourages pre-applications from partnerships or consortia led by or including local organizations. In this context, NEA defines partnership as a negotiated arrangement among organizations that provides for a substantive, collaborative role for each of the partners in the planning and implementation of the project. Pre-Applications intending to represent a coalition of providers should be prepared to provide, if requested, a signed partnership agreement stating:

- An intent to commit or receive resources from the prospective partner(s) contingent upon receipt of funds;
- How the partnership arrangement advances the objectives of the project;
- Supporting documentation identifying the resources, experience, and expertise of the partner(s);
- Evidence that the partner(s) has been involved in the planning of the project;

- Clarification of the role of the partner(s) in the implementation of the project, evaluation, and sustainability.

Additional Information on Eligibility: All Federal assistance recipients must have a Dun & Bradstreet Number prior to funds disbursement per a new U.S. Government policy (published in the Federal Register June 27, 2003) applicable to all grant recipients. At the time of application submission, please ensure that your organization has applied for a DUNS number. You may acquire a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or you may request a number on-line at www.dnb.com

IV. Pre-Application/Proposal Submission and Deadline: Concept papers are not to exceed seven pages, and may be submitted in English, French or Arabic. While a full budget is not required at this stage, one may be attached to the pre-application. Applicants, however, must provide an estimate of the comprehensive annual cost of tasks and activities projected in the pre-application.

Selected pre-applicants will be invited to submit a full proposal for funding consideration and may receive technical assistance in this process.

Submission: Civil Society application materials may be submitted to the U.S. Department of State, Laura Schulz, NEA/PI, mailing address: c/o Room 6258, 2201 C Street, N.W., Washington, DC, 20520. Pre-applications must be by e-mail sent as an attachment to nea-grants@state.gov.

Submissions by e-mail and either (1) mail (including express mail or overnight mail services), or (2) hand-carried by applicant couriers or by other representatives of the applicant, shall be considered as meeting an announced deadline if they are submitted before 11:59 p.m. on the due date.

V. Review and Selection Process: Submissions under this announcement should include information addressing the following criteria. Each pre-application will be evaluated and rated on the basis of these evaluation criteria that are designed to assess the quality of the proposed project, and to determine the likelihood of its success. The criteria are closely related and are considered as a whole in judging the overall quality of a pre-application. Only those pre-applications scoring highly enough will be invited to submit a full application for U.S. Government funds.

Results or Benefits Expected—The applicant clearly describes the results and benefits to be achieved. The applicant identifies how improvement will be measured on key indicators and provides milestones indicating progress. Proposed outcomes are tangible and achievable within the grant project period. (30 points)

Increased Local Leadership, Ownership, Innovation, and Sustainability – The applicant describes how the project will increase the ability of local leaders and their organizations to advocate effectively with citizens, civil society groups, business groups, media and government officials in support of reform. Innovative initiatives to build reform networks, improve the effective use of media and volunteer campaigns in reform outreach, and broaden the base of support for reform across the many sectors of society, including the religious community and religious leaders, are detailed. A key element of program design is sustainability, progressively achieved throughout the project, by innovative advances in local and regional leadership and societal ownership of reform efforts. (20 points)

Approach—The applicant must demonstrate that its strategy and plan are likely to achieve the proposed results; that proposed activities and timeframes are rapid, reasonable and feasible. The plan describes in detail how the proposed activities will be accomplished as well as the potential for the project to have a positive impact on reform efforts in the Middle East and North Africa. (20 points)

Organization Profiles—Where collaborators are proposed, the applicant describes the rationale for the collaboration, each partner’s respective role, and how the coalition will enhance the accomplishment of the project goals. In all cases, the applicant describes joint planning consultation efforts undertaken. Individual organization staffs, including volunteers, are well qualified. (20 points)

VI. Award Administration and National Policy Requirements. Those applicants selected for award based on the pre-application and full proposal stages of competition under this RFA will receive grants provided that they execute a bilateral grant agreement containing terms and conditions prescribed by U.S. law and regulation (see, e.g., Title 22, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 145).”

